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AUTHOR Richardson, Robert B.; Rayder, Nicholas F.
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ABSTRACT

Three self-esteem research guides, based on research data collected for the California Task Force to Promote Self Esteem, are presented. This research supported the belief that low self-esteem is directly related to low school achievement and school dropout. These assumptions are stated: (1) self-esteem can be measured; (2) a person's self-esteem can be changed; (3) change in a child's self-esteem can be directly influenced by a friend, a parent, a teacher, or another caring person; and (4) parents and teachers are critical players in developing a child's self-esteem. Each guide includes a chart that indicates the age and grade level appropriate for the research findings; a summary and explanation of the specific research finding; and suggestions to help teachers and parents translate the research findings into activities that can support self-esteem development. The first guide looks at the effects of self-confidence on school performance. The second guide discusses group counseling as a means to improve self-esteem and achievement levels for dropout prevention. The third guide looks at how a person's resources affect achievement. (LLL)

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SELF-ESTEEM RESEARCH GUIDES.

SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT AND SELF-ESTEEM

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Robert B. Richardson, Ph.D.
and
Nicholas F. Rayder, Ph.D.

Background and Source of Data:

The California Task Force on Self-Esteem asked seven professors from the California University system to search and summarize the latest research findings on self-esteem. An extensive book was written with chapters discussing the relationship between self-esteem and major problems such as school achievement, drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, teenage suicide, etc. These research summaries provide our primary data base.

Our Purpose:

In this series, our primary objective is to report the relationship between self-esteem and school achievement. First, research findings specific to school achievement are highlighted. Then we will suggest ways that teachers and parents can apply the findings to child growth and development.

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*Based on research data collected for the California Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem and Social and Personal Responsibility

Our Position:

Research compiled by the California Task Force supports our belief that low self-esteem is directly related to low school achievement and school dropout. Some people, however, will argue that the research data linking self-esteem and achievement are not conclusive, and that we should wait until better studies are conducted. This position reminds us of the argument between smoking and lung cancer. The majority of data strongly support the link between smoking and lung cancer. And today, more and more people stop smoking because they believe that cigarettes cause cancer! Yet a large portion of our society still smoke and the cigarette industry still discredits the research. With over 30% of our youth educationally at-risk, the stakes are too high. We must act now, using the research we have, to develop self-esteem programs in all schools.

We assume the following:

A. Self-esteem is real! Self-esteem can be measured. Low self-esteem can contribute to and cause other events, such as low school achievement or school dropout. Similarly, in-school activities which highlight respect, praise and recognition, can lead to and cause high self-esteem.

B. No one is stuck! A person's self-esteem can be changed. Low self-esteem can be changed by implementing programs that focus on developing healthy self-esteem.

C. Anyone can help! Change in a child's self-esteem can be directly influenced by a friend, a parent, a

teacher, or another caring person.

D. Parents and teachers play a critical role!

Parents and teachers are critical players in developing a child's self-esteem. And adults often need some clear guidelines to know when, where and how to inspire healthy self-esteem development.

What follows:

The "Self-Esteem Research Guides" that follow are based on research data collected for the California Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem. Each guide includes:

1. A chart that indicates the age and grade level appropriate for the research findings.
2. A summary and explanation of the specific research finding.
3. Suggestions to help teachers and parents translate the research findings into activities that can support self-esteem development.

References:

GUIDE ONE:

Catterall, James S. An Intensive Group Counseling Dropout Prevention Intervention: Some Cautions on Isolating At-Risk Adolescents within High Schools. Revised draft, April 1987. To be published in American Educational Research Journal.

GUIDE TWO:

Weiner, B., & Sierad, J. (1975) Misattribution for failure and enhancement of achievement strivings. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 31, 415-421, cited by Covington, Martin V. Self-Esteem and School Failure: Analysis and Policy Implications, 1988.

GUIDE THREE:

Weiner, B. (1972) Theories of Motivation: From Mechanism to Cognition. Chicago: Markham.

(1974) Achievement, Motivation and Attribution Theory. Morristown, NJ: General Learning Press

(1979) A Theory of Motivation for Some Classroom Experiences. Journal of Educational Psychology, 71, 3-25.

SELF-ESTEEM RESEARCH GUIDE ONE

TOPIC: THE EFFECTS OF SELF-CONFIDENCE ON SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

This report discusses research findings that can be used by teachers and parents to provide the needed building blocks for self-esteem development. These findings are taken from the California Task Force on Self-Esteem Research Summary.

This chart identifies the grade level for these findings:

Grade Level

	Pre	Elem	Mid	High	Col/ Adlt
Teachers			O	O	●
Parents			O	O	●

Research conducted ● and applicable O for this level

Summary of Research:

This research examined whether changing a student's beliefs about his achievement level would change his real level of achievement. Two questions were studied:

1. Will students who are very self-confident and (who usually do well in school). change in their performance because they believe that something is interfering with their ability to perform? and

2. If a student believes he will do poorly on a task, but had an excuse for poor performance, would he perform better on the task than if he had no excuse?

To study these interesting questions, the researchers took a group of "high-confidence" college students who were good at performing tasks involving hand-eye coordination. The students were given a "drug" (actually a sugar pill) and were told that the pill would affect their ability to perform the task. (Fake drugs used in research are called "placebos".) This group of "high confidence" students did not perform as well as usual, even though the placebo (a sugar pill) had no effect on their ability. The students performed at a lower level because they believed the placebo (a sugar pill) would lower their ability level. This "belief" about how they would perform actually did influence their performance.

To answer question number two, a group of "low-confidence" students was identified. These students felt they would do poorly on the task. They were then given the same placebo (sugar pill) that was suppose to interfere with their ability. In fact, they performed better than was expected on the task. Why?

Findings:

Changing a student's feelings about how well he can learn will have a clear effect on how well he will learn! This effect is

very close to a notion (self-fulfilling prophecy) where "what you expect is what you get".

This study demonstrated that what a student believes about how he will perform, and especially about the outcomes of that performance, will have a real effect on those same outcomes.

What this means for you as a parent:

When your child fails, help him discover the true reasons for the failure (such as insufficient or improper preparation) to protect his self-image of ability. Also, help lay plans to avoid a future repetition of failure.

As a parent, it is important for your child to experience a series of successes. Ask questions your child can answer correctly. Show him how he can use his strengths to learn facts he doesn't know.

Remember, how your child believes he will perform in school will affect his performance. It is important for a parent to support a child and tell him over and over that he can achieve, that he can learn and that he can perform well.

If a child "fails" a task, focus on what was done correctly. Every test score can be stated in terms of what has been learned. As parents we need to celebrate what has already been

learned and help focus the student's abilities to what still needs to be learned.

What does this mean to you as a teacher?

You can change your students' outcomes not only by helping them build knowledge and skills, but also by changing the students' beliefs and feelings about their ability to achieve.

Treat "wrong" answers and mistakes as learning experiences. Everything a child says, every answer he gives is a right answer to some question. Sometimes its the teacher's job is to match the answer to its appropriate question.

For example, after a lesson on colors in a Kindergarten class, the teacher might hold up a red object and ask, "What color is this?" When Sam answers "Green", the teacher can hold up a green object and says, "Here is a green object" She can then go offer Sam another chance or ask "Is it red or green?" In this way Sam's self-esteem is built by making him feel that he has made a valuable contribution to the days' class-work. He has learned "Red" and did so in front of his peers.

This approach recalls the highly successful TV show "Jeopardy" where contestants must find the question that matches a given answer. This reversal of the usual question/answer ritual can be as successful in the classroom as it is on the TV screen.

This concept of turning "wrong" answers into "right" answers can apply in any situation at any grade level.

Also, try to understand a students' excuses for poor performance for what they really represent.

Kids build and stock-pile excuses for poor performance...Some common excuses include:

- "I didn't have enough time."
- "I didn't understand the assignment."
- "I was sick."
- "The dog ate my homework," etc.

These excuses give kids an "out" and allow them to protect the self. Be aware that in using excuses, students are often trying to shore up their self-image. Kids feel that their school performance reflects on their ability, and that ability is directly linked to their self-worth. Excuses are healthy attempts to insulate battered self-esteem if they are not used to an extreme.

SELF-ESTEEM RESEARCH GUIDE TWO

**TOPIC: GROUP COUNSELING TO IMPROVE SELF-ESTEEM
AND ACHIEVEMENT LEVELS FOR DROPOUT PREVENTION**

This report presents research findings that can be used by teachers and parents to provide the needed building blocks for self-esteem development. These findings are taken from the California Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem and Personal and Social Responsibility Research Summary.

This chart identifies the appropriate grade level for these findings:

Grade Level

	Pre	Elem	Mid	High	Col/ Adlt
Teachers			O	●	O
Parents			O	●	O

Research conducted ● and applicable O for this level

Summary of Research:

Two University of California researchers tested the effectiveness of group counseling workshops for students as a way to increase student self-esteem and thereby reduce school dropout rate.

From a group of 300 juniors in danger of dropping out from a large urban high school, 155 were selected to participate in a dropout prevention program. The program featured a one-week live-in workshop where students were helped to build a better self-image. It was felt that this healthier self-image would result in improved academic achievement and a reduced school dropout rate.

While the group workshops did not improve academic achievement or school dropout rate, they did unexpectedly create a rich and supportive environment for positive student social interaction. This increase in social interaction explained the students' enthusiasm for the workshops.

Findings:

In this study, the researchers tried to reduce school dropout rate and increase academic achievement by increasing a students' self-esteem. The researchers assumed that raising students' self-esteem would result in increased academic achievement, which in turn would result in a lower school dropout rate. They also assumed that the elements they taught in the workshops (such as goal setting) would improve self-esteem.

With a high school population, identifying and pulling out certain students for a concentrated (4-day) workshop on self-

esteem was not shown to improve students' self-esteem. Further, the students who participated in this program did not get better grades, nor was their dropout rate reduced. In fact, their dropout rate increased slightly.

Nevertheless, nearly all students were satisfied with the workshops and, in fact, showed a reduction in absenteeism. They also showed an increased participation in home-room activities. This lower absenteeism and increased home-room participation continued even after the study ended.

As a result of the conditions of this research study, the school provided an environment which improved social interactions among students. This was accidental! The workshops did not improve school grades, but did improve student attitudes toward school experiences. Good attitudes toward school experiences are needed to achieve in school.

These results point to the importance of social interaction among students at all grade levels. If healthy social interactions are not available or encouraged in the school, students "turn off" and look outside of school to satisfy these needs.

What does this mean for you as a parent?

Be aware of the social interactions your child has with his

friends. Know that healthy interactions among youngsters can contribute to healthy self-esteem. If these healthy interactions carry over into school, they can help increase achievement. This is true at all ages and at all grade levels. So don't wait until high school to promote your child's interactive skills with other children.

In addition, learn about what your child's school is doing to build and support healthy student interaction.

What does this mean for you as a teacher?

Here are some school programs that help students develop healthy social interactions:

- The "buddy" program at Herbert Hoover Elementary School in Redwood City, California, pairs classes at the primary (K123) level with those at the upper (456) level. A marked increase in positive cross-age interaction was noted for students and their teachers in participating classes. Also, requests from both older and younger students for more "buddy time" mark the success of the program.

- Self-esteem support classes were initiated in the same school. Teachers identified one or two students in their classes as "most in need" of self-esteem support. These students attended a twice-weekly self-esteem support hour led by Pam Stine, a

mentor teacher focused on self-esteem. Students participated in activities that allowed them to experience a series of successes, both in classroom work and in the social interactions.

SELF-ESTEEM RESEARCH GUIDE THREE

TOPIC: HOW A PERSONS RESOURCES AFFECT ACHIEVEMENT

This report presents research findings that can be used by teachers and parents to provide the needed building blocks for self-esteem development. These findings are taken from the California Task Force on Self-Esteem Research Summary.

This chart identifies the appropriate grade level for these findings:

Grade Level

	Pre	Elem	Mid	High	Col/ Adlt
Teachers	O	O	O	●	O
Parents	O	O	O	●	O

Research conducted ● and applicable O for this level

Summary of Research:

This research first explains that each person has a set of his own characteristics (things about him) that affect his achievement. Among other things, each person has ability, effort, time and luck. For example,

Ability affects achievement because if you have it (if you are able), you can achieve.

Effort affects achievement because the harder you work the more likely you are to achieve something.

Time affects achievement because how much time you apply to something will determine how well you achieve that activity.

Luck affects achievement because a student can believe that luck really affects his performance (for example, "The questions the teacher picked for the exam were the ones I knew the best!")

Ability, effort, time and luck are things students can use to achieve. How they use these things or resources will affect achievement. Further, what the student believes about "his ability", "his effort", "his time" and "his luck" will affect achievement just as directly.

Findings:

Researchers found that how students perceive their resources will help determine the level of school achievement. Ability, effort, time and luck are the reasons most students give for their successes or failures in achievement. For example, students will be less likely to try to achieve if they believe their past successes were caused by "luck". Students will also be less likely to achieve if they believe that past failures were caused by insufficient ability. On the other hand, students who believe they achieve because they have sufficient ability to do a task will expect to do well on similar tasks in the future.

Ability, effort, time and luck are resources students use to complete a task. If these resources are well developed, the task can be completed well. If these resources are of lower quality, the task may not even be attempted.

Completing a task is also influenced by how a student feels about the resources he has. If he feels the resources are "adequate", and they are in fact adequate, then the task will get completed well.

If he feels the resources are "inadequate" (whether they are actually adequate or inadequate), he is less likely to complete the task or will tend to complete it poorly.

So, the resource "tools" a student has, and "how these resource "tools" are perceived by the student, both affect how well that student will achieve a task.

Whatever "tools" a child has developed, it is important that the child feel that those tools are useful at some level. No child is at zero ability level! Every child has the ability to accomplish something!

How parents and teachers can use this information:

It is important to praise a child for things he attempts or

accomplishes. Also praise him for completing parts of things. When a child accomplishes things at home, no matter how small those things, he gets a feeling he can do things. This feeling that he can do things is important for school and for life. Help the child recognize, and then use his own personal resources or "tools." For example, if a child is often too much in a hurry, you might try to identify a task (like sweeping the floor or putting a puzzle together) where "being in a hurry" is an advantage.

Some children read sooner than other children. Even though one child may be faster in learning to read than another child, when these two students are grown they may both read at the same level. So while reading is important and we should encourage learning to read, probably as important as reading ability, is a love for books and a desire to learn new information.

It is important that students develop skills like reading to feel that "they are smart" and that "they can do it". We should try to convince all children that they have the ability to learn. Whichever "level" students are performing at, they are "valuable" and "smart" and they should feel good about their "ability to learn".

For example, if a child reads and misses some words, first focus on the words that were correct, then read to him the sentences

containing the words missed. Or, if a child makes a bed but it's "lumpy" you could focus on the fact that the child made an effort to make the bed, rather than focusing on the lumps.

Even though a student does believe he has sufficient knowledge to answer a question or to do a task, he should try. Trying should be encouraged and reinforced by parents and teachers as much as completing a task. Many great discoveries in science were "accidents", made by people who just tried to solve the problem and found the solution.